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“Talking Frankly” about David Irving

A Critical Analysis of David Irving's Statement on the Holocaust

By Hadding Scott

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An important technique that Irving uses to support the claim of mass-murder in the Operation Reinhardt camps is to claim that documents mean something very different from what they actually say. Irving reinterprets a letter from Heinrich Himmler to Heinrich Müller, which seems to demonstrate Himmler’s concern for the wellbeing of prisoners, as actually demonstrating the opposite. Irving says:

> *“If you really know how to look at the private papers of Heinrich*

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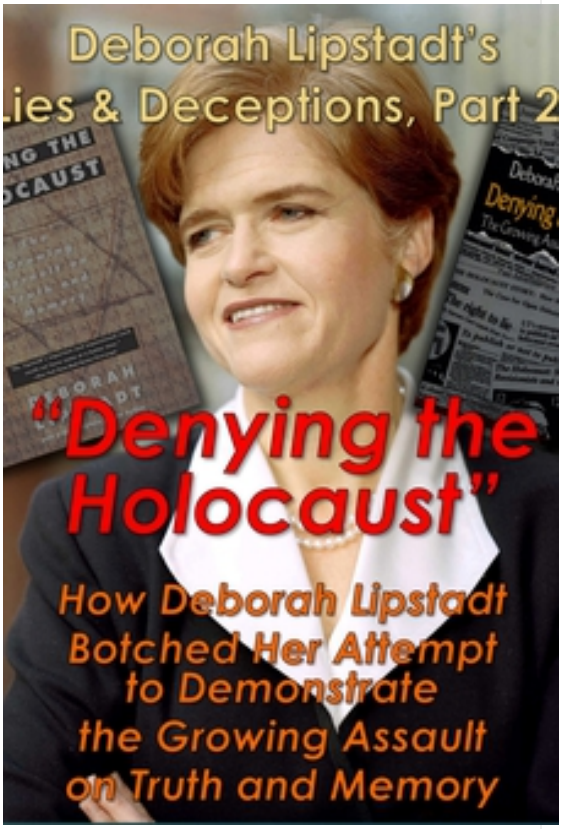
Deborah Lipstadt's
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The Lies and Deceptions of Deborah Lipstadt

Deborah Lipstadt's claim to fame is her 1993 book *Denying the Holocaust* and the events it triggered. This video exposes her book as a collection of lies and deceptions.

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> *the chief of the SS, you begin stumbling across documents that have been clearly written as part of a coverup.*
>
> *"September 1942. He writes a letter to the chief of the Gestapo, Heinrich Müller, saying, 'There's this very disturbing report in the London Daily Telegraph which has come to my hands, which says that the Jews are dying like flies in our camps. I want you to investigate this and find out just what is going on.'*
>
> […]
>
> *"The Germans were in the habit of writing what they called Deckungsschreiben, coverup-letters, letters that would exonerate them in the case that things went wrong – alibis. That letter from Heinrich Himmler to the chief of the Gestapo, Heinrich Müller … is a coverup-letter.* (1:42:00 – 1:43:11)

Irving pretends to believe that Himmler wrote this letter *to create the appearance* that he did not know that Jews were being systematically killed in the Operation Reinhardt camps. The problem, which Irving of course does not mention, is that the report of Jews "dying like flies" was specifically about Theresienstadt – not about the camps that Irving is discussing. The United Press carried the story:

> *"Fifty thousand Jews from Germany and Czecho-Slovakia have been thrown into the Austro-Hungarian*

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> *fortress at Terezin and several thousand who are ill or charged with 'criminal' acts are in underground dungeons where they are 'dying like flies,' a Czech government spokesman said last night."* (*UP*, 3 September 1942)

Note the untrustworthy source: an unnamed "Czech government spokesman." Arthur Butz quoted from this report in his *magnum opus* and commented as follows:

> *"The only truth in this story lies in the fact that the death rate of Jews was rather high at Terezin (Theresienstadt) due to the German policy of sending all Reich Jews over 65 there. Another category at Theresienstadt was the "privileged" Jews - the war veterans - especially those with high decorations. There were other Jews, many of whom were eventually moved out, but if they suffered, it was not at Theresienstadt. The place was visited by the Red Cross in June 1944, and the resulting favorable report angered the World Jewish Congress "* (Butz, *Hoax of the Twentieth Century*, p. 99)

Irving commits a multiple misrepresentation here, not only ignoring the lack of substance to the report about Theresienstadt, but also pretending that it was about the Operation Reinhardt camps instead. There are also problems with Irving's claim that the Germans habitually wrote *Deckungsschreiben*.

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The premise that Irving gives for interpreting Himmler's letter as disingenuous – that the Germans habitually wrote *Deckungsschreiben* or "alibis" – is a smear against the German military. It was not only Himmler, according to Irving, who did this. The claim that the Germans were habitually arranging alibis for themselves presupposes that they were habitually committing crimes.

Where does Irving get this?

The term *Deckungsschreiben*, in a context where it denotes something that someone with responsibilities in the German military would write, is quite rare. It appears twice in Albert Speer's 1981 book, *Der Sklavenstaat. Meine Auseinandersetzung mit der SS* ("The Slave-State: My Quarrel with the SS"), where Speer twice attributes the writing of *Deckungsschreiben* to *Wehrmacht*-General Wilhelm Keitel.

If Speer attributes this practice to Keitel, it does not follow that the use of such *Deckungsschreiben* was widespread as Irving claims, since the common (most likely unfair) postwar representation of Keitel has been that he, more than others, was a sycophant to Hitler.

Furthermore, the meaning of *Deckungsschreiben* as used by David Irving has shifted over the years, in a way that makes it more derogatory. Responding to Rabbi Robert Chevins in 1999, Irving defined *Deckungsschreiben* as:

> *"... a letter somebody has obtained from his superiors to cover him, just in case. In the case of the extermination of the Jews, had Hitler given such a verbal order, one would have*

> *expected Himmler, or Heydrich, or Mueller, or somebody of that ilk to make a Note for the Record, “just in case”; or, less formally, to have mentioned it in a letter-home, or in a private diary ….”* (D. Irving to R. Chevins, 15 July 1999)

There is nothing disgraceful in the proposition that men in positions of responsibility would want a written record of an order that might become controversial later, especially if they are operating within a system like the German military with a high level of discipline, where a man might be put on trial and convicted by his own government if he does wrong and cannot produce “superior orders” as a defense. It is simple prudence to make sure that there is a written record of important orders, in case there is any question about who was responsible.

But what David Irving means today with the word *Deckungsschreiben* is not that the Germans documented commands, but that they were habitually creating false alibis for crimes, which is a very different matter.

There are so many things wrong with Irving’s interpretation of Himmler’s letter to Müller that the most likely explanation seems to be that he was hoping that nobody would check.

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